

THE FOURTH
Catholick Letter
IN
ANSWER

TO

Dr. Stillingfleet's SERMON, Preach'd at
GUILD-HALL, November 27th. 1687.

Entituled,

Scripture & Tradition

Compared,

Address'd to His AUDITORY.

By John Sergeant.

Published with Allowance.

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Lamb in High-Holbourn. 1688.

THE FORTY

Catholic Letter

ANSWER

De Salligette SERMON. Printed at
Glasgow. May 1688. A new edition.

Answer to the Author of

the Catholic

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READER.

Perhaps the smart Expressions and plausible Methods that Dr. St. so affects in his late Discourse concerning the Nature and Grounds of the Certainty of Faith, in which he pretends to Answer the Catholick Letters, may have rais'd Expectation in many indifferent men, and Triumph in some of his Partial Admirers; wherefore, to stay the Appetites of the former, and give some check to the over-weening of the latter: I thought it fitting to say something here by way of Preface, to give our Readers a short Account of his main Performances in that Discourse, till I come to publish a Compleat Answer to the whole. What I affirm of it, and undertake to make good, is;

1. That he so strangely prevaricates from the whole business we are about, that he even forgets we are Writing Controversy; and would turn the Polemi-

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cal Contest in which we are engag'd, into a Dispute
of School-Divinity; bearing the Reader in band,
That we are Treating of Faith, as formally Divine,
and of all the Intrinsical Requisites to it, as it is such;
tho' none of them be Controverted between us, and
some of them are perhaps onely Knowable by GOD
himself. The meanest Reflector may discern how im-
possible 'tis for the Dr, My self, or any man living,
to put such Particulars as these into our Proofs, or Ar-
guments; and how unpardonable an Absurdity 'tis to
alledge them in our Circumstances. The very na-
ture (I say) of Controversy, obliges and restrains
us both to speak of Faith precisely according to what is
Controverted between the Contending Parties; and
the nature of our present Contest, which is about an
Absolutely-Certain Rule to know this matter of Fact,
that Christ and his Apostles did Teach the Doc-
trines we Profess, determines us both to speak of Di-
vine Faith precisely as it stands under such a Rule,
recommending our Faith to us, as deliver'd by Christ,
and proving it to be his genuin Doctrin.

2. That, whatever the Big Letters in his Title
pretend, he neither shews from the Nature of
Faith, as it lies under our Consideration, that it
does not need the Perfect Certainty we require; nor
that the Certainty he assignes to make us adhere
to it as True, is not Perfect Uncertainty; since
he

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he does not bottom it on the firm Ground of the things themselves without us, in which Creative Wisdome has imprinted all Truths ; but, on our own airy Apprehensions, or undoubting Perswasions ; which must necessarily be Unsteady, when the Knowledge of those Things does not Fix them. Particularly (which more closely touches our present Controversy) the Certainty he substitutes to that advanc't by us, which excludes Deception, is impossible to be manifested by Outward Arguments to others, being only his own Interior Satisfaction or Opinion ; which, as it is Invisible, so it may, in Disputes, be, with just reason, Rejected by any man at his pleasure.

Lastly, Whereas he pretends to lay Grounds for the Absolute Certainty of Faith, he shall never be able to shew he has laid any one Ground thus Certain (which is what he pretended) worthy the Name of a Ground, for the only Point in debate ; viz. That Christ and his Apostles taught thus or thus ; but instead thereof, such feeble Foundations, as leave Christian Faith, whose Truth depends necessarily upon the Truth of Christ's Teaching It, in the opprobrious and scandalous condition of being possibly (or perhaps) False. In a word, he was to shew the Absolute Certainty of his Grounds of Faith, and he so handles the matter, that one would think

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think, instead of shewing them, he were shewing there was no such Certainty Requisit, and so none needs to be shewn.

The rest of his Answer consists, generally, of impertinent Excursions, disengenuous Cavils, witty Avoidances of any Rub that should hinder his Discourse from sliding on smoothly. His mistakes (whether Sincere or Affected the Reader is to judge) are numberless, his scornful jests frequent, and either meer Trifles, or built upon Chimæreas of his own Invention. All which deliver'd in Poignant and Smart Language, give a pretty tang of Gayety and Briskness to his Discourses, and counterfeit a kind of liveliness of Reason; when as I dare avouch, and shall make it good, he has not one Single Argument that is Pertinent and Sincere in the whole Course of his Answer. I pass by his Omissions, which are both very many, and most important; as likewise how he does not take his Adversaries Discourse End-wayes, as I did His; nor gives the due force to his Arguments; but Skips up and down, here and there, Skimming off the Superficial part of them by Playing upon his Words, without regarding the full Sense; that so he might make a more plausible mock-shew of an Answer. Lastly, his Evasions, as is the natural Progress of Non-plust Error, are still worse and worse, and are Confuted by being Detected. 'Tis easy to discern

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earn by his Expressions he is much Piqu'd and out of Honour; nor can I blame him; for 'tis too severe a Tryal of Patience, for a Man of his great Abilities and Authority, to be so closely call'd to shew his Grounds why he Holds it ~~True~~, or which is the same, **Impossible to be False**; that the Faith he pretends to, was indeed Christs Doctrine, and to find himself utterly unfurnish't with any means to perform it.

But I have reason to hope there will need no more to let the Reader see that all that Glisters in the Drs. Writtings is not Gold, but his carriage in this Sermon of his which I now come to examine; and to make him judge, that, if he hath dealt so delusively with his Auditors when he spoke out of the Pulpit in God's Name, he will scarce behave himself more sincerely towards me, when he speaks in his own.

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et nunc est omnia in gloriam vestram. Et dicit Ihesus
vobis. Ne temere venatis. sed etiam in exercitu vestrum. Et dicit Ihesus
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THE FOURTH

Catholick Letter.

Gentlemen,

S. 1. **V**hen Controversies are Preach't out of Pulpits, every Well-meaning Hearer is apt to conceit, that what sounds thence is

to be receiv'd as a *Voice from Heaven*: Too great a Disadvantage to be admitted by a Person concern'd, who judges he is able to shew 'tis but a *false Echo*: especially, when he sees this forestalling the World by a Sermon, is a meer preparation to turn the Question quite off the Hinges; and, withal, as the Preface intimates, to bring it from the handling *one single Point*, which bears all the rest along with it, to the debating of *many*; none of which can be *decided*, till *That* be first *clear'd*. Hence I esteem'd it not only a Justice to my self, but a Christian Duty to others, to Address my Defence to You, his Auditory; who (I fear) were led into Errours by many particulars in that Sermon, relating to our Controversy. I have reason to hope this Discourse will keep your Thoughts *Impartial*; which done, I will desire no other Umpire of our Contest, at present, but your selves.

S. 2. It being the Chief and most Precise Duty of a Controvertist to secure the *Truth* of Christian Faith,

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and this not being possible to be done, without proving it *True* That Christ or his Apostles taught it: hence, it has ever been my Endeavour to establish that Fundamental Verity in the first place, by settling some Method that might secure it with a *perfect* or *Absolute Certainty*. Nature tells us, an *End* cannot be compassed without a *Means* enabling us to attain it; whence, the first thing to be examin'd is, what that *Means* is, that is to give us this *Certainty*. Your common Reason assures you, that what's [True] cannot possibly be *False*; and the common Sentiment of all Christians, and the very Notion of *Faith* it self, has, I doubt not, imbû'd you with this apprehension, that your *Faith cannot but be True*; nor does any thing found more harsh to a Christian Ear than to affirm that *All Christian Faith may perhaps be but a Lying Story*; which yet 'tis unavoidable it may be, if it may not be *True* that 'tis *Christ's Doctrine*.

* 3. You will wonder perhaps, when I acquaint you this is my greatest quarrel with Dr. St. and others of his Principles, that they make all Christian Faith *possible to be False*. Dr. Tillotson, with whom he agrees, and whose *Rule of Faith* he approves, maintains there, that there is no *Absolute Security* to be had from our being Deceiv'd in judging we have the right *Letter*, or right *Sense* of the Holy Scripture, or that they were Writ by those Divinely-inspired Persons; but that, notwithstanding all the certainty we can have of those particulars, * *It is possible all this may be otherwise*. This I say, as appears by my Preface to the *Second Catholic Letter*, and by my Discourses quite through all the *Three*, is our Grand Contest, under which all our other differences subsume. But this Dr. St. was so prudent as to conceal from you, lest it should shock all his well-meaning Hearers; and I do assure you, and shall

* Rule of
Faith. p. 118.

shall show it; that in those matters which he thought expedient to let you know, he so misrepresents every thing, that he has both deluded You, injur'd the Truth, and quite dropt the Question. Whether he is to make Satisfaction to Truth and to You, or I to Him, is to be determin'd by the Evidence I bring to make good my Charge. To State the Question then.

¶ 4. As to the *Holy Scriptures*, my very Principles oblige me to declare that what I attribute to them, is, *First*, That they have *All* those Excellencies which Dr. St. yields them, and *one more* which he does not; of which hereafter.

Secondly, That they are *Profitable* to all the Ends St. Paul writing to *Timothy* ascribes to them; and that in such a high measure, that I do from my heart grant them to be so great an Instrument of our Salvation, that the Church had been at an incredible loss without them; & that not near half the number of Christian Souls would have been sav'd, had it not pleas'd God to leave to the Church such a Powerful Means to instruct them in a virtuous life, and raise them up to it.

Thirdly, That, when they are animated with the Sense of the Divinely-Inspired Writers by a *Certain Interpretation*, they are very useful to confute Heretics; and that, *Thus Interpreted*, they are with much profit made use of, to that end, by Fathers and Councils.

Fourthly, That, tho' they were written on several occasions, it was not without the *Design* of God's good Providence, which orders all our Actions to the bringing about his Best Ends, however they be *occasional* to us; much more an Affair so mainly important to the Churches improvement.

Fifthly, That there was also a peculiar Providence

in preserving the Letter from any material Corruption; and, that the Second Causes by which this Providence exerted it self, was the most obligatory Care of the Church to whom those Sacred Oracles were committed, and the Knowledge she ever had of Christ's Doctrine. of a
6thly, That the Sense of Scripture is so sublime in Spiritual Points and high Mysteries of Faith, which are above Nature, and could only be known to the World by Divine Revelation, that no men by their Private Judgments, much less all sorts of men *coming to Faith* (and therefore unelevated and unenlighten'd by It) can arrive at the knowledge of it's Sense by the Letter in those difficult Texts, with such an unerring Certainty as is requisit for that most Firm, Rational and Unalterable Assent, call'd *Faith*; and, therefore, that in These, they need the *Help of the Church*: Whereas in other passages that are Historical, Moral, &c. where the subject matter is more obvious to ordinary Reason, they are either clear of themselves, or may be clear'd, as much as is necessary, by the Learning of the more Knowing Faithful. For the same reason I hold, that Scripture, thus privately interpreted, is not convictive of Hereticks, who have imbib'd a contrary sentiment to that of the Divine Enditer; because those men admit no Certain Interpreter of those difficult places. And, this want of Clearness in such Texts, I do not take to be a Privative Imperfection; but, on the contrary, to argue a very high Perfection in Scripture; viz. as *Vincentius Lirinenus* has told us 1200 years ago, *Commonitor*, cap. 2. It's Deep Sense; Whence 'tis rather to be call'd properly, a Disproportion of that Sense to the low Conceptions of Private Judgments looking after Faith; or an Obscurity, relatively to such Persons, than an Absolute one: since the Faithful, who are instructed in that Sense, are both capable

capable to understand it right; and moreover to discover still more and more Excellent Truths in it.

7thly, That for this reason, I cannot hold the Letter of Scripture privately interpreted the *Rule of Faith*, or a Means for people of every capacity, looking after Faith, to know the *Sense* of it in those Dogmatal Articles; with such a *Certainty*, as was shewn * above to be Necessary for a Ground of *Faith*; nor can I allow that the *Truth* of *Christian Faith* ought to be built upon such a Sandy Foundation as are those *Private Interpretations*. And, therefore, that there needs some other Rule to Ascertain people of all sorts what is Christ's true Doctrine in those points. Moreover, I make account the Experience of all Ages since Christ's time abets my Position. Every Heretick, and all his Followers, relying on his *private Interpretations* of Scripture for his wicked Blasphemies; as the *Socinians* do now, who are (as far as we can discern) sincere and exact Followers of that *Rule*, or *Users* of that *Means*; and yet fall short of Christ's genuin Doctrine, denying his Godhead, and the Mystery of the B. Trinity. A plain Argument that *That* cannot be the way to *Truth*, which such vast multitudes have follow'd, and yet have been led into Error, unless we knew them all to be wilfully sincere, or strangely negligent; which we can neither know, nor have reason to think. And, as experience has shewn this to every mans eye, so neither is it my sentiment onely. The same *Lirinensis* telling us, That by reason of the Scripture's Depth, as many Opinions as there are Men seem possible to be drawn thence. Where he ascribes the obscurity of the Letter not meerly to the fault of the Persons, nor the hardness of the Words, in which the Sense is deliver'd, but to the Profoundness of the Sense it self; Reason and Experience both informing us, that, where

S. 2.

* Ibid.

where the matter is above the Readers capacity, tho' the Words be never so plain, yet the Doctrine is not easily comprehended without some who is already skill'd in that Sense.

6. 5. As for Tradition; The very sound of the Word may perhaps give you some prejudice against it, because our Saviour reprehended the Jews for some unwarrantable *Traditions* of theirs. This obliges me to give you a true Character of our Tenet concerning it, and to make known to you particularly what [Tradition] means, as we understand it in our Controversies; which Dr. St. (tho' he knows it) will never do; but, on the contrary, (as shall be seen) misrepresents it all along very disingenuously in every particular. What we hold of it then, is,

First, That the Apostles, by their *Preaching* during the whole time of their lives, settled the self-same Christian Doctrin in the minds of the Generality of the Faithful, dispersed in several Countries; and not only at large and particularly explicated it, and fixt it by their heavenly *Preaching*, but riveted it (as we may say) by *Miracles*; founded Churches, and constituted Disciplin; by means of which, and their own Example, they establish't them in the *Practice* of that Doctrin. Lastly, They recommended the continuing it as the means of Salvation; and, consequently, that the swerving from it themselves, or neglecting to educate their Children in it, was the assured way to Eternal misery to them and their Posterity.

2dly, That this *vast multitude* unanimously settled in the same Faith is that which we make the *First Source of Tradition*; which had no more to do but to arrest to the next Age what the *First* had receiv'd and practis'd; nor could they forget a Doctrin which was so recommended,

mended, and according to which they had led their Christian lives so long : Nor could true *Faith* (the Parent of all other Virtues) which was in their hearts, no nor even the *Natural love* to themselves and their Children, permit them all to be so *Wicked* as to decline from it voluntarily; or neglect to educate the others in it ; however, it was to be expected there would be now and then a *failure* in some *Particulars*; deserting the former Doctrin, and drawing Proselytes after them.

3dly, That, the same reason holds for the *Continuate Delivery* of the same Doctrin by the *Second Age* to the *Third*, and so still forwards; the most powerful Motives God himself could propose being laid to oblige Christians not to deviate from it in the least, or be careless to recommend it. And those Motives too a thousand times more lively imprinted and apprehended by the heaven-instructed Faithful, than they were by any in the former Ages of the World, before Christ.

4thly, That by [Tradition] then is meant, *The Testimony of the whole foregoing Age of Christians to the next Age, of what had been deliver'd, and explain'd to them by their Living Voice and Practice.* Or, taking Tradition (as it ought to be) for Oral and Practical both, 'Tis, *A Continu'd Education of undergrowing Posterity in the Principles and Practice of their Immediate Predecessors.*

5tly, That hence 'tis Evident beyond needing Proof, that this Rule cannot (on it's part) deceive us. For, putting that it was still follow'd, or, that Posterity still believ'd and practis'd as their Immediate Fore-Fathers did, who at first believ'd and practis'd as the Apostles had instructed them ; 'tis manifest the Last Age of the World must have the same Faith that the First Age of Christianity had. Whence follows evidently that no

Error

Error could possibly come in at any time unless this Rule of Tradition had been deserted.

6tly, That Tradition, thus understood, (and we never understood it otherwise) being the Living Voice and Practice of the Church in the immediate Age before, is applicable to all even of the lowest Capacity; as we experience, to some degree, in the instructions by Pastours even now adays. And, since it delivers it's Sense (which, in those that have follow'd that Rule, has been even now shewn to be Christ's Doctrin) by Preaching, Catechizing, Explaining, daily Practising, and all the ways imaginable to make it understood, 'tis also an Absolutely-Clear Conveyer of Christ's Doctrin downwards. Add that, should it's sense be at any time misapprehended, the Church and her Pastours can explain their own meaning, pertinently to the Askers, Doubter's or Mistaker's Exigencies; which a Letter in a Book cannot.

7thly, That the Chief Care of the Church was to inculcate to the Faithful, and preserve inviolate the Chief Points of the Christian Faith; and, therefore, that Tradition did most particularly exert it's self in Teaching and Transmitting Those.

8thly, 'Tis not to be deny'd but Scriptural Tradition went along with this other we have explain'd. For the Church having the same sense in her breast which the First Writers had, were, consequently, the best Interpreters of it; which was one Reason why the Fathers and Councils often made use of it to confute Hereticks, and comfort the Faithful by it's concurrence. But, when they were to convert any to Faith, it was never heard, they took such a Method as to put the Bible in his hand, and bid him look for his Faith there; telling him 'twas Plain even in the highest points, that were dubious or Controvorted, to every capacity.

9thly,

Only, That, hence Scripture, * without the Churches help, was never held by them Anciently, nor can with reason be held by us now to be the Rule of Faith, in the sense we use that word; that is, to be a Means or Way for All who are coming to Faith, to arrive unerringly at

*Dr. St's. Second Letter,
P. 21.

Faith, we hold that the Sense of Scripture's Letter, in those sublime Points, surpasses the apprehensions of private men coming to Faith; and so, the Letter alone cannot be an assured Ground to build the Truth of Christian Faith upon: whence follows that *Tradition* (which is Plain and Easy) and only it, can be in Proper Speech the Rule of Faith.

¶ 6. This then is the true State of the Question between us: This is our true Tener, both concerning Scripture and Tradition, and what are the Points to be ascertained by them. Now, let us see how the Sermon represents us, and whether your admired Preacher does so much as touch any one of these particulars.

¶ 7. In the first place you may please to take notice that he never lets you know, or so much as suspect that the main Content between him and me is about the Absolute Certainty, or Uncertainty of Christian Faith. His wicked Design, in that Point, oblig'd me to write a whole Treatise formerly in Vindication of Christianity from such an Intolerable Scandal; which I apply'd, in the sense of it, against himself and Dr. Tillotson. Had he let you know this, he prudently forefaw your Zeal for Christianity (your best Concern) would have given you a just prejudice against his Sermon, and the Preacher too; and the very Conceit all Christians have of the Truth of their Faith, would have made you abhor a Discourse out of a Pulpit, maintaining it might possibly be a Ly. As for particulars

* Faith vindicated from possibility of falsehood.

P. 1.

s. 8. First, he talks of a *Stedfastness*, and a firm and well-settled resolution to adhere to that Faith which Christ himself deliver'd. But, ought you not to be assur'd first that he did indeed deliver it? Or are you to adhere to it as his, whether you are certain 'tis his or no? Or is a resolution, to hold stedfastly to what you judge is the Faith of Christ, well-settled, if that Faith of yours, the *Body* of your Spiritual Building and *Ground* of that Resolution be not well-settled it self, but may sink into *Falsehoods*? This is the true Point you are to look after; and, till you have perfect satisfaction from him in this, will it to consider, that *Pious Talk* without *Solid Grounds* to support their *Truth*, is but painting the out-side of a pulcher. The tinkling cymball of a little Rhetorick, and shews of much Reading, may go far with persons whom such flourishes can prevail upon to forgo their Reason; but he had but a very small respect for you, if he hop't you were so easy to be play'd upon with the wind of a little articulate ayre.

P. 4.

s. 9. It was very possible, he says, for them to have *mistaken* or *misremember'd* what was at first deliver'd. Whom does he mean by [Them]? What by [First Deliver'd]? Does he mean the *Universality* of Christians in the *First Age*, or any succeeding one? Or that those Great Bodies settled in their Faith, form'd into Church-Government, and kept up to their Christian Duties by Discipline, could thus *mistake* or *misremember* the former *Teaching* and *Practice*, which was a plain *matter of Fact*? This is the only Tradition we ever spoke of, or went about to defend. None doubts, but that, when some single Apostle was Preaching in some places at first, the Thoughts of the Hearers were as yet raw, and the things that were told them were so strange, that they did not immediately sink deep into the Conceptions of

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the Generality. But, it was otherwise, when in tract of time that Doctrine was farther spread, more often inculcated, and more clearly explain'd; and well-instructed Pastours constituted, to Teach it more expressly, and put them forwards to practise it. He mistakes then and misrepresents the whole nature of Our Tradition; and by antedating it, fights against it, before it could have a Being. And, as this Error runs through all his Discourses, and weak Inferences out of Scripture; so the laying it open once for all, is a full confutation of them all at once. Add, that he never consider'd whether, when those several Churches Err'd, or were in hazard to Err, they did so by following even that particular Tradition, or Preaching of such or such an Apostle; or, whether they came to err by deserting it. If the Later, the Tradition was not faulty, but They who Deserted it; Yet, how different soever these two Points are, the one making for that particular Tradition, the other against it, he never thinks of distinguishing them, or letting the Reader know when the Tradition was in fault, and when the Persons; but runs on in common words, as if he had no Design, or determinate prospect whither he was going. I am sure it is not at all towards the true Question, nor against Us.

§. 10. But, tho' all his Reflexions from the several pieces of Scripture are quite besides the purpose; yet his Candid and Solid way of managing his own Mistakes, and how he wire-draws every thing to make it seem fit, deserves our particular observation. He tells us, speaking of the Church of Corinth, that They (which signifies the whole Church) *bad like to have lost All their Faith*; whereas the Text only sayes [Some among you.] And, is it such a wonder that some among many should hap to be imperfectly instructed, fantastical or refracto-

p. 11.

ry to their Teachers. But his Partiality is most remarkable. When he was forc'd to be beholding to the Churches Testimony of Doctrine (which is our Tradition) to abut the Scripture; he could tell us then, *This is very different from the Case of particular Persons in some Churches, who might mistake or forget what was taught;* but (says he)—*the Churches themselves could not agree to approve on Error in the Gospel contrary to the Faith deliver'd to them.* So that therd it was a very differen Case; but here it seems the Case is not differen at all, but the very same. For [Some among You] are enlarg'd to signify that Church it self, and whereas the *city Point* those Some deny'd, was *The Resurrection of the Dead,* to let you see how utterly insignificant a thing Tradition is that can do no good at all, he extends it to signify [All their Faith] hoping I suppose any thing would pass upon you, so twere spoke out of a Pulpit, 'Tis told you there, All's God's Word; and he presumes you will be so Civil to God Almighty, and so Kind to himself as to accept it for Such, and swallow it for Pure Truth.

p. 10, 11.

¶ 11. I am oblig'd to him for allowing, *That the Testimony of every Christian Church did shew the Concurrence of all the Apostles, as to the Doctrine contain'd in the several Gospels.* For then, I hope, they may be able to shew to the next Age (and so forwards) the concurrent Doctrine of the First, which establishes the Original of our Tradition to be *Absolutely Certain.* He discourses well (p. 11.) and he ends better; *That the Memory of the Apostles Doctrin was so fresh in their Minds, that it was in effect the Consent of all the Apostles who had taught them.* And yet better; *That the concurrent Testimony of all the Apostolical Churches could not let them agree to approve an Error in the Gospels, contrary to the Faith deliver'd to them.* This is very extraordinary

ordinary kind and no less solid. For, 1. these Words, [could not agree to approve a contrary Doctrine] makes their Testimony Infallible. 2. This discourse makes the acceptation of the Truth of the Gospels, that is of their Sense, depend on *Unwritten Tradition*. 3. We cannot doubt but that Doctrine was *Full as fresh in their Memories*, when they were grown *Older*, and were to transmit it to the next Age after the Apostles decease, as it was before; unless they lost the Memory of it, by discoursing of it *more* while they taught it to others, & by *Practising it longer* themselves. 4. As little can it be doubted but the Doctrine and Practise of the First Age, was as *Fresh* in the minds of the *Second* Age, since they *Led* their Christian *Lives* by it; for it was Equally Intelligible, and of Equal Concern still to them to *Learn and Teach it*, as it was to the *First*. Lastly, That this being so, the Testimony of that Body, even now a-days, that adheres to *Tradition*, * is in effect, the Consent of all the Apostles that taught it at *First*. Observe, Gentlemen, that this is the only time Dr. St. has so much as touch't upon *Our Tradition*; and that he is so far from impugning or confuting it, that he, in some part directly, in others by *necessary Consequence*, acknowledges it's force, and strongly abets it. But, it was not out of good will; he was intent in that place upon making good the *Truth of the Gospels*; and, as soon as he has made use of it to serve a present turn, he immediately discards it as good for little or nothing, or nothing to the particular purpose he had lately allow'd, the *Testifying Christ's Doctrine*.

S. 12. For the very next page, he reckons up three things, for which, *The common Tradition of the Apostolical Church* were useful after the Decease of the Apostles. But not a word of their Usefulness to *Testify* to others what they had learnt from those Masters of Christianity. No sooner were

* p. 11.

P. 12.

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the Apostles dead, and that first Age had, by their concurrent Testimony of the *Doctrine* they had receiv'd from them, given credit to the *Truth* of the *Written Gospels*; but immediately the whole Christian World had lost their *Memory* of that *Doctrine* on a sudden, and the *Grace* to preserve and propagate it. One would think by this wild Discourse of his, that both Common Natural parts, and all degrees of Ordinary Honesty had been preserv'd to them miraculously thitherto, meerly to recommend the Truth of the *Gospels*; and, that as soon as *that* was done, and the Apostles were dead, the Author of Nature and Grace suspended or rather subtracted for ever all his Influence, & left them a *Tabula rasa* (without either *Memory* or *Goodness*) to learn their Faith anew out of *Scripture*.

P. 13.

§. 13. And, hence it is that he rallies upon Universal Testimony or Tradition as if it were some slight story of a few Tatling Gossips, or of those who heard what some say, that others told them, who had it from such, &c. Whereas had he said as he ought to have said, *What the whole First Age of Christians witness to the next Age, that They had heard, seen, and practic't; and the whole next Age to the Third, and so forwards, with an Obligation still to transmit it, Equal to that the First Age had to believe it*, there had been no place left for his ridiculous Raillery. But his constant Method is this; he endeavours to put you out of conceit with *Tradition*, by concealing every thing that might give you a true Conceipt what *Tradition* is, and what we mean by it.

P. 14.

§. 14. The Argument or Instance he brings to prove that the *Authority of Tradition* was mightily sunk in the *Second Century*, is, if possible, ten thousand times worse, One would verily think, from those big words, he would prove that *All* the Christians of the *First Age* had inspir'd to tell a Ly to the *Second*, concerning Christ's Doctrin.

Doctrin. But, this mountainous Expectation came off with a poor little mouse, the relation of one single man, *Papias*, of what an Apostle had told him; which he being a good honest Soul, gain'd credit with diverse. Tho', as for his wit, Dr. St's Author, *Eusebius*, tells us he was a man of a mean capacity, and scarce understood the meaning of what was spoken. I wonder the Dr. blush't not to put such a Slur upon his Auditory, as to compare the Publick Authority of the whole Christian World, and the Universal Testimony of God's Church, to the private story of one weak man; or to pretend hence that if he were mistaken, the Authority of Tradition mightily sinks and fails; whereas 'tis only his own Credit that falls into that disaster by making such a senseless Argument. Yet, this is the best, and, as far as I can find, the only one he has brought to prove directly the First Age of Christians had bely'd Christ's Doctrin to the Second, and that because one man of a mean Capacity mistook, we may stand in doubt of our Assurance whether all the Learner'd Faithfull, nay all the Pastours and Bishops in the Church, had Capacity enough to know an open matter of Fact, viz. what had been taught and practis'd publickly every day by a World of Fore-fathers, or the Integrity not to deceive us.

S. 15. Of the same stamp is his alledging that St. Luke's reason why he writ his Gospel, was to give *Theophilus Certainty of those things wherein he had been instructed.* The Subject of our Enquiry is about the High Points of Christian Belief: Does the Dr. think then that *Theophilus* was not a Christian, or had no Certain Knowldg of his Faith, ere St. Luke writ? Or, that the Apostles did not instruct people in those Main Articles? Or that St. Luke's Writing those Points in short (for those Points we speak of take up a very inconsiderable part of his

his Gospel) could make him know it better, and with more Certainty than their Preaching is at large. With what Sense can any of this be pretended? The Apostles did Miracles to attest their Doctrine: Did St. Luke do any to attest the True Sense of all he writ in those Points? Again, what did his Gospel contain? Only those Dogmatical Points controverted from time to time between the Sons of the Church, and her Deserters; of which, and none but which, we speak? Alas! these are the least part of his Gospel, and make but a small appearance in it. He relates our Saviour's Genealogy, Temptation, Fasting, Miracles, Parables, his sending his Apostles and Disciples, his Exhortations to Repentance and good Life, the Manner of his Entering into Jerusalem, his Instituting the Last Supper, the particulars of his being apprehended, accus'd, condemn'd, and Crucify'd. Lastly, his Burial, Resurrection, Apparitions and Ascension. These are laid out in that Gospel at Large, together with many excellent sayings of our Blessed Saviour related *verbatim*. And These, as they were never pretended by us to be the Object of Tradition; so, tho' spoken of frequently (and perhaps variously) amongst Christians, were impossible ever to be perfectly remember'd by the Generality, unless put in a Book; and therefore St. Luke gives *Theophilus* (and others) the Certain and particular knowledge of all these Passages by Writing: And Dr. St. confesses the same (p. 17.) and that his aim and Intention was to give an Account of the Life and Actions of Christ, but not a word that his Writing was to give *Theophilus* Certainty or a Clearer Knowledge of those Main Articles, to ascertain which Tradition is pretended by us to be the most proper Means.

§. 16. Now let's see how many notorious prevarications and faults he has fallen into in this one Instance.

i. Our

1. Our whole Controversy is about the Certainty of those sublime Points of Christian Faith; which he conceals, and confounds them with a multitude of particular Passages.
 2. He intimates our Tradition is to ascertain all that's contain'd in St. Luke's Gospel. Whereas, he knows well, we rely upon no Tradition but what's in some degree Practical, which those Particulars are not; unless it be those, of which we keep Anniversary Solemnities. 3. He is so angry at Tradition, that he pretends the very Oral Tradition or Preaching of the Gospel by the Apostles, needed something to strengthen and confirm it. Lastly, he makes our Tradition to begin with the first Preaching of the Apostles; whereas, it dates it's Original from the first Age of Christianity already perfectly instructed by them, during all their Lives, and settled into Ecclesiastical Order and Discipline at their Decease.

pag. 15.

¶. 17. He seems at length to come nearer the Point, and affirms, *That the Writings of the Apostles, when Matters of Doctrine came to be contested, were the Infallible Rule whereby they were to judge which was the true and genuin Doctrine of Christ; and, which is yet better, that They were intended by the Holy Ghost, to be a standing Rule, whereby the Church was to judge which was the true and genuin Doctrine of Christ.* I am glad with all my heart, to hear him speak of the Church being a Judge of Controversies; or, that he allows Her any hand in ascertaining and proposing Faith. I ever understood him hitherto, That every sober Enquirer was to judge of the sense of Scripture for himself; That it was plain to him even in the highest Points; and, that if, in any contested or dubious Articles, the Letter of Scripture did not declare it explicitly, his sober Enquirer could *by parity of Reason render any Implicit Point Explicit, *without the Church's help; tho' this was

pag. 14.

* Dr. St's Answer to the Catholic Letters, p. 7¹
 * Dr. St's Second Letter, p. 21.

the most difficult Task as to the penetrating the Sense of Scripture that is possible, and far beyond the understanding what's there *Explicitly*. He told us too in his *Second Letter*, p. 31, 32. that, because there is no *Infallible Judge* — every man is to Judge for himself; and this by Scripture, his Rule. But, here the case is alter'd, and the Church is to judge of Christ's *Doctrine* by Scripture. I can allow honest Retractions without upbraiding them; and am contented that the Church should judge by Scripture, both when She is to Edify Her Children, and in *contests* with Hereticks, as to all those Points contain'd there; and, I think the only difficulty in that particular is, *By what means* She came to be *Absolutely-Certain* of it's *Sense*. Let him add then but one word more, and say that by the Letter of Scripture She so judg'd of Faith, that She could not be in an Error, or mistaken all the while, and then *Christian Faith* is *Absolutely-Certain*, and my greatest care is over. And, if he does not *that*, what is the future Church, after the Apostles Deaths, the *better* for Scripture's being an *Infallible Rule*, if She and Her Children *partake* not the Benefit of that *Infallibility* some way or other, by being perfectly secur'd from Erring in Faith? Is it not all one as to the intent of knowing assuredly we have the Faith taught by Christ, whether we have an *Infallible Rule* or no, if, when we have done our best, we may still stray from Her Faith? Or, why is not a Rule that is not *Absolutely-Certain*, so I have *Absolute Certainty* I am directed by it, as good for that purpose, as an *Absolutely-Certain Rule* with no *Absolute Certainty* that I do indeed go according to it. To speak to his proposition: Whether the Church and the Faithful in *Contests with Hereticks* avail'd Her self of Scripture's Letter, to gain *Absolute Certainty of it's Sense*, in those main Tenets; or brought the Sense (which She had another way)

way) along with her, shall be decided if he pleases, by St. Austin, whom he cites here, p. 16.

See p. 15.

§. 18. He will prove Scripture a *Rule* from the general Reason of it's Writing; and prove this general Reason from a Testimony of *Irenæus*, which speaks of the Gospel as abstracted from being *Preach'd* and *Written*; and who doubts but as such it is infallibly true. He seems to build much upon the Words [*That it might be a Foundation and Pillar of our Faith.*] Be it what it will in it self, the Point is, How does it Build Faith in us? By it's meer *Letter*, descanted upon by *private Judgments*, or, interpreted by the Church? The Later he denies; the Former, all our most earnest Pressing and Intreating could never bring him, nor his Reflector to go about to make out; and he waves it totally through this whole Sermon. Let him then but shew, that he has Absolute-Certainty of Scripture's Sense, in those Tenets of Christian-Faith, by any Method his Principles will allow him, and his Sermon should have past for me without Controul. *That's* the main Point, whereas all here is quite *besides* it. As for those Words from S. *Irenæus* he could have quoted the very same words (in a manner) from a better Author (even the Holy Scripture) calling the *Church, the Pillar and Ground of Truth*; but that he lik't not the Application of them to the *Church*. It seems he can neglect his *Rule*, and make no more reckoning of it than he did of the Oral Tradition, or Preaching of the Apostles, when it stands in his way, or comes crois to his purpose.

§. 19. It has been manifested above, that his Discourses from the writing of the Gospels and Epistles are all guilty of the same Fault, and Ante-date our Tradition; and his Inferences thence, as level'd against our Tenet, are weaker than Water. He makes Tradition any thing what

p. 16, 17. &c.

what he pleases, and will have it do every thing, tho' it was never intended for it, nor ever pretended by us it was able to do it. One while it must bring down the * Decrees of Councils. Another while it must convey * long Disputes about divers Points; and the resolution of them, and this *Totidem Verbis*, otherwise the Apostles Sense might have been lost.

* p. 19.

* ibid.

* p. 20.

It must secure people from being * remov'd from Christ's Gospel to another; whereas no man ever held that the *Galatians* were remov'd from Christ's Gospel by following even the particular Tradition or Preaching of that Apostle; nor that any particular Men, nay Churches, might not be remov'd from it even into *Heathenism*, or *Judaism*, if they deserted it. He expects too, it should secure men from * danger of being Deceiv'd; whereas, supposing them once well-Instructed in Faith (and 'tis suppos'd to our Tradition the

* See above Church was so) 'tis * self-evident they can never be deceiv'd while they hold to that Certain Rule; because that is to hold the same they were instructed in at first. But if all were not well instructed at first, as 'tis impossible they should, then they might be deceiv'd, either by deserting Tradition, or even by holding to such a Tradition; if, for want of perfect Instruction in that raw and unsettled state of Christianity, that which they held at first was not perfectly Christ's Doctrine. Nay, he would have it keep even Hereticks from * Defection, Hypocrisie, Lying and Deceituring: which were a rare Tradition indeed, to do such Kindnesses, and work such good Effects upon those who had deserted it, and would not make use of it; at least, he would have it keep People from Weakness and Folly, which the Common Assurances of Nature and Grace will do, after the Generality is well settled in that Doctrine. For, when all the Question is, What the Apostles preach't, 'tis a Madness and

* Ibid.

S. 5. Note 5.

and Folly both to believe some few men, before the Universal Testimony of the Christian Church. But he will have Tradition still do all the Mischiefs imaginable, and Writing do all the Good; forgetting, I suppose, that there are some things in St. Paul's Writings, * which the Unlearned and Unstable wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures, to their own destruction. All this while, What is this to the Tradition we assert, which begun afterwards?

§. 20. From these impertinent Premises, he infers as impertinent a Conclusion, viz. That, * what was deliver'd in Scripture contains a compleat Rule of the true and genuine Faith, as it was at first deliver'd to the Church. Now, that what's signify'd by Scripture is the same the Apostles signify'd by their Preaching, is plain Sense, and never deny'd; and, so he needed not have made all this clutter to prove it. But plain sense will do him no service, whose best play 'tis to blunder and confound every thing; let us see then what it is that will. His first words [What they have therein delivered] can mean nothing but the Sense of Scripture; for that is the thing signify'd or deliver'd by the Letter; and both sides confess, that the Sense of Scripture is Christ's Faith. If then we spell his Words together, they plainly amount to this, That Christ's Faith contains a compleat Rule of the true and genuine Faith, as it was deliver'd at first to the Church, that is, Faith it self contains a compleat Rule to it's self. Make sense of this who can. The best I can make of it is, That the Conclusion keeps decorum with the Premises; and that he has mighty well employ'd his Labour to keep such a huge Pother to infer such a worthy Point.

§. 21. I have nothing to do with his Objecting some of our Writers, but shall come to his * Second Reason, drawn from the notorious Uncertainty of meer Tradition; and that never was any trial made of it but it fail'd, even

* 2 Pet. 3. 16.

* P. 22.

* P. 23.

when

when it had the greatest Advantages. Expect Gentlemen, by those high and mighty Words, he will bring most Convincing Arguments, to prove that the Universal Testimony of the Church in delivering down those high Points of Faith is *notoriously Uncertain*, and fail'd in every Age, nay, the very *First*, for then it had the Greatest Advantages; the Christians having then *fresh Memories*, and being then Infallible, since they could not agree to approve false Doctrin, as himself told us p. 11, 12. For my part I am of his mind, and never knew any other Tradition have *Advantages* comparable to what Christian Tradition had for transmitting the Doctrine of Faith; and if he lets you know what those Advantages of *Christian Tradition* were, and shews them unable to oblige the Church to convey Christ's Doctrin down, he will gain his Point: But, if he prevaricates from this necessary Duty, he abuses you with fine *Luke-warm Words* to no purpose. I do assure you before hand, tho' he talks here of *Advantages*, he has not in his whole Sermon mention'd, much less ingenuously inform'd you of any one *Advantage* Christian Tradition has; but industriously conceal'd every particular that gives it force. Yet, who sees not that without doing this, 'tis impossible to *impugn* it, or deal fairly with his Auditory; for how should you judge of the *Comparison*, without a clear sight of the things *Compar'd*?

§. 22. He did very prudently, not to insist on the failing of Tradition in the Law of Nature; For 1. He must have shewn *It* fail'd *them*, and not *They* fail'd *It* by *deserting* it; which could only be done by proving that had they continu'd to follow it, they could have stray'd into *Polytheism*; which he can never do, it being evidently Impossible. 2. That, to make good the Parallel, he must have prov'd it had as *Ample an Original* (which gives

gives a vast force to *Testifying Authority*) as *Christian Tradition* had ; which is equally impossible ; for it had for its Source but one single man, *Adam*. 3. That there were not more powerful Motives, nor greater Assistan-
ces of Grace to continue the Christian Doctrine under the *Law of Grace*, than there were under that most imper-
fect *Law of Nature*; nor more exact Discipline in the *Church of Christ*, than there was in that loose State : which had been hard Points, and altogether impossible even to attempt with any shew of Reason. He did very wisely too to *Wave the Opinion* of the *Millenaries*, the time of *Easter* and the Communicating of *Infants*. For he both knows that every Apostolical Tradition (had this last been suppos'd such) is not necessarily an Article of Faith ; as also that none of these (nor yet their contrary) was a Point of *Christian Doctrine* Preach'd and Settled unanimously over the World by the Apostles. He made account he had a better game to play, by shew-
ing how * *Tradition* fail'd in delivering down the *Apo-
stles Creed*. But he might, had he pleas'd, as well have left out *That* as the *Others* ; for * none of the Explainers of Tradition ever held or said it was to bring down *Set Form of Words*, which requir'd application of Memory and Repetition of them in Order ; but only the *Sense* of the First Age (which was Christ's true Faith) instill'd after a connatural way by *Education* ; and apt to be express'd in different Words, according to different Circum-
-cess.

§. 23. Were it granted him, That * *things Written* (sup-
posing the *Letter* could be prov'd to be still continu'd *Absolutely Certain*) had the *Advantage*, as to the *Certain-
ty of Conveyance*, above *things meerly committed to Me-
mory and Tradition*; yet he is where he was. The Point
between us still sticks; that is, Whether *meer Words*,
expressing

ibid.

* P. 23. 24.

* See my third
*Catolick Let-
ter* §. 2, & 3.

* P. 26.

expressing in short such *sublime spiritual Tenets*, as are most of the chief Articles of Christian Religion, are so Clear to private Judgments, nay, to *All* (even the *Vulgar*) that are looking for Faith, that they can have that perfect Assurance of their *true Sense*, as to build that Never-to-be-Alter'd Assent, call'd *Faith*, upon their understanding them. *This* is the summ of our difficulty; this is what we most *insist* upon, and are perpetually *pressing* him to shew the security of the Method he takes to give us *this Certainty*: I do not mean the Certainty of the *Letter* (about which he keeps such ado) but of the *sense* of it in such Points, if he thinks any one of them so necessary, that the Generality cannot be sav'd without the knowledge of it. This is it, which most imports *you* to know, if you value the having such Grounds for your *Faith*, as ought in true reason to perswade *you* 'tis *true* that it was Taught by Christ, or that *you* are not perhaps *dociend*, and in an *Errorr* all this while. But, not one word of *this* in the Whole Sermon. * He argues from God's making choice of *Writing*, when he deliver'd the *Ten Commandments*. What means he, or how can he apply this to our *Question*? Are the *Ten Commandments*, which are *plain honest Nature*, of as *Deep* and *Mysterious a Sense*, as the *high Points* we speak of? Are they so hard to be understood, that *Writing* is not a *clear Conveyer* of God's Sense in *such Matters*? Does he hear a great part of the World at variance about the Meaning of the *Ten Commandments*, as multitudes of Hereticks have been Wrangling with the Church ever since Christ's time, about the Sense of Scripture in those *Dogmatical Points*? Were the Texts which contain those Points as plain to all Mankind as the *Ten Commandments* are, or as are generally the *Historical* and *Moral* parts of Scripture, I should frankly declare, that

Scripture

Scripture might in that Supposition be a Rule of Faith, as to the Points contained in it; and that there would be no need of the Church for our simply believing, but only to confirm our Faith, explain it more thoroughly, when any part of it, imply'd in some main Point, is deny'd, apply it to our Consciences by her Preaching, and keep it up to the Doctrine it delivers by her Government and Discipline. So that our Controversy-Preacher, who has never hit the Point hitherto, doubly misses it here in his representing Tradition, as held by us needful to supply the defect of Clearness in Moral passages, that are plain enough of themselves; and that 'tis to bring down *Ser. Forms of Words.* (which is not its busines) whatever it be those Words express. And this shews his Mistake in his "Second Proof," viz. the restoring the Knowledge of the Law Written by a Written Book; which was a Way most Proper for that End. Whence, for the same Reason, if there were any deviation from the Christian Doctrine, which as contradicting it to that other, was writ in the Living Tables of the Hearts of the Faithful, the best Way of preserving or restoring That, was by the Sense writ in the Heart of the Church at first by the Preaching of the Apostles, and continu'd ever since, in the manner we have describ'd and prov'd.

¶ 24. But, The Dr. is got into a Track of mistaking, and he cannot get out of it. He brings for his Third Argument our B. Saviour's advice to the Jews to search the Scriptures. The busines was, to know whether he was the true Messias; and the Prophecies relating to the Messias were Matters of Fact, or else Moral; and therefore proportion'd to the Understanding of the Searchers; and plain enough, so they apply'd but Industry & Diligence to find them out. Are your *Mysteries* of Christian Faith such? Or, Must weak unelevated Understandings therefore

* p. 27.

Ibid.

profane to penetrate the Meaning of the Scripture's Texts or to keep a Sense as those *Mysteries* are, because the Jews were exhorted to do it, in a matter within the Sphere of their Capacity? Again, The Tradition of *many* was very strong, that a *Messias* should come; so that *This* was the Person, there was no Tradition at all. This was therefore either to be made known by his Miracles done to attest it, or to be found out by the applying of diverse particulars to *Him*, and by seeing they did appear in him. And did ever any of us pretend, the Tradition was to bring down such *particulars*? If he say we did, he must shew where! If he confesses we did, he must confess withal, his Text and Discourse here is nothing to the purpose. He turns it off from the Admiration of searching the Scriptures to know the true *Messias* to the knowing whether he were a *Temporal Prince*, whereas the Tradition of his Kingdom's being purely *Spiritual*, was neither Universally held, taught, nor deliver'd at first by the First Founders of that Law, nor settled in the hearts of the Synagogue, or the Universality of the Jews in the beginning, as Christ's Doctrin was by the Unanimous Preaching of the Apostles in the hearts of such a numerous Multitude as was the Christian Church of the First Age. Which being evidently so, What reason was there our Saviour should refer them to such a *Scripture*, or rather *no Tradition*, and not to the Written Prophecies, in which he was foretold? Or, What consequence can be drawn hence to the prejudice of Christian Tradition, which, and which only, we defend; and which (as was fitting) is so strongly supported, that it is impossible to find a Parallel to equal or come nigh it. And unless this be done, all his Arguments against it stand thus, *A Lesser Force cannot do an Effect, therefore a Greater cannot.* An odd piece of Logick, but suitable to all the rest.

IS. 45. His Fourth Reason represents Tradition to be
merely *Verbal*, and non *Practical*. That it (alone) is to
bring down particular Matters of Fact, or Historical pas-
sages, nay, the Speculative Whimseys of the old Heathers
Physiologers. None of which was ever pretended; and
so all his Discourse runs upon his old and oft-repeated
Errour in the true meaning of Tradition, and what divides

st. 26. The Reasons he gives for the Certainty of the
Books of Scripture, we allow to a Tittle; and we add to
them One, over and above, which is better than them all,
viz. the *Obligation and Care of the Church*; which, as She
ever held the Scriptures to contain the same Doctrine
which was preach'd to Her at first by Christ's Order, and
that it was a most incomparable Instrument for the *Edifi-
cation of her Children*, the Abatement of Faith, the Salvation
of Mankind, nay, and *Influence upon Men's Selfs* too in thousands
of most excellent, most useful, and most enlightening passa-
ges; so She could not but look upon her Self as most highly
oblig'd to preserve the Letter from any material Altera-
tion; and yet more particularly, in case any Hereticks
west about to corrupt it in any *Errors* (nay, *Cogs* or
Poynings) that concerned the main Articles of Christi-
anity, which they sometimes attempted; the Doctrine of
Christ in her Breast, could easily direct them to set the
Text right again, and that with Absolute Certainty.
Nor does any say, or so much as suppose any Book of
Scripture is indeed lost, as he hints, p. 19. only upon his
saying, That "the Scripture we have now, contains all the
Divine Revelations"; I us'd the right of a Disputant, and
put him to make good what he says, and to prove he has
the Absolute Certainty he pretended to, that no Book
was lost, without which he could have no such Certainty
those pieces of Scripture we have now, did contain all
the Divine Revelations; which, by his Grounds, deny-

* See Third
Catholic Let-
ter, p. 36.

ing any certainty but what might admit of Decret, I
was sure he was not able to perform a bus.

P. 30.

¶ 27. Nor do I at all doubt of the Influence of Divine Grace, or of other Internal Satisfaction, which good Souls who are already faithful, (as is St. Thomas of Aquino cited by him) expresses himself; *Quae sit Fides et Faith, by which they have a right Judgment of those things which are agreeable to that virtue)* receive concerning Scripture and Christ's Doctrin; or that they confirm men more than Demonstration does; Argument, have the Nature of Illustrancies to Faith, or Scruples after it; but the Internal Satisfaction, that that Heavenly Doctrin rectifies and purifies the Soul, and levels it directly towards the Attainment of it's last Blissful End, has the nature of a kind of Experience; and, as it were, Possession and Enjoyment of what Humane Arguments, previous to Faith, had been looking after, and contending for. I suppose, Gentlemen, the Dr. brought in this Discourse to prepare your Minds by a shew of Piety, were it appay'd with any slight Reason that falls short of concluding, and breed in you a prejudice against the necessity of his producing any such Arguments as place Christian Faith above Possibility of Falshood. But, he is as much out of the Way here as he was in all the rest; For, notwithstanding God's Grace, and this Internal Satisfaction, which is Proper to good Souls who are Believers already, the Church and her Pastours must be furnish'd with solid and unanswerable Reasons, to satisfie perfectly those, both of the lowest and most acute capacity, who are looking after Faith, that the Doctrin She professes was taught by Christ; and, to evince and defend its Truth, in that particular, against the most subtle Adversaries; which cannot be done, unless the Reasons which we, as Controversists, bring, set it above possibility of Falshood, that Christ taught it.

We

We cannot put God's ~~Grace~~^{*} and our *Internal Satisfaction* into *Syllogism* when we are *disputing*. Nor does God intend by His Grace to prejudice the true Nature Himself has given us, which is *Reason*; but to perfect and elevate it. Tis against *Reason*, that in Preliminaries to Faith, which are the Objects of *Natural Reason*, those who are capable to penetrate the force of reasons, should assent beyond the Motive; for, as far as it is beyond the Motive, tis *without any Motive*; that is, *without any Reason*, and, therefore (whatever often happens through the Imperfection of *Creatures*) such an *Irrational Assent* could never have been intended by God. Whence, as it belongs to Infinite Goodness to give those who sincerely seek for Truth, the *Grace* to embrace it; so it belongs to Infinite *Wisdom* to lay such means to arrive at Truth, (that is, in our case, such a *Rule of Faith*) as both *evince* its Truth to those who are capable, according to the most exact Methods of True Reason; and withal, perfectly secure those from Error who follow that Rule, let them be as Weak as they will. If then we are bound to *embrace Christian Faith as a Truth, and profess it to be* so, it must be indeed such; and therefore the Grounds left us by God must be of that nature, as to prove or conclude it to be such: and, if Dr. St. have no such Grounds, that what he holds is really *Christ's Doctrin*, he ought not to handle or preach Controversie; since he must necessarily disgrace and weaken Christian Faith, when he is to credit and establish it. Nay, he ought not to pretend he has that most firm, and most strongly-supported Assent, call'd *Faith*, which depends necessarily on the Certainty that it was taught by Christ, but candidly yield he has *Opinion* only in that Point; not an *Unalterable Belief*; it is *True*, but only a good *Conceit* or *Hope* that it is so, or *may be* so: Too weak a Prop to sustain it's

* See *Error Non-plug.*
P. 134, 135.

it's *Truth*, as it leans on Christ & his Apostles, having taught it, or to settle the *Basis* of all our Spiritual Life.

¶ 28. And now let's apply this Discourse to his Ground or *Rule*, by means of which he is to be thus assur'd, or able to assure You of the *Truth* of those Controverted Points, which you hear so warmly disputed in the world, and which it so much imports you to be satisfy'd in. 'Tis Scripture's Letter in Texts that are thought to relate to those Points) as understood or interpreted by Himself, or any other Private Judgment. What he has then to do, is to make out with *Absolute Certainty*, that this Method of arriving at the Knowledge of Christ's True Doctrine, as to those Points, cannot be *Dereful and Erroneous*. Otherwise, 'tis unavoidable, his Faith, and all Christian Faith, no better grounded, may be *False*, and, by consequence, is not *True*. He will tell you Twenty fine Stories, and give you many pretty words of it's being *Sufficiently Certain*, *Morally Certain*, that it has such *Assurance* as men accept for other matters, &c. But ask him smartly and closely, if any of these *Certainties* or *Assurances* are *Impossible to be False*, and he must not, nor will deny it: for, should he say it, he must pretend he could not be deceiv'd in his understanding those Texts right, which he could not do without professing *Infallibility* in that particular. Observe, I beseech you, where the stress of the whole Question lyes. 'Tis in this, Whether this Ground or Method of his to be assur'd of Faith, is able to prove it to have been truly and indeed taught by Christ, so as it was not possible it should be otherwise. By this Test, if you examin the *very good Grounds* for the *Certainty* of his *Protestant Faith*, which he promises you here in his Preface, you will find evidently the only gives you *very good Words* instead of *very good Grounds*, and that, whatever he produces, whether he quotes or argues,

he

he will never vouch them to be so Certain, but *Deceit* and *ERROR* may possibly consist with them. He will complain, that 'tis an unreasonable expectation, because the nature of the things will not bear it. And what's this, but to tell you in other terms, that there neither is any Absolute Certainty of Faith, nor can be any: which bids fair for Atheism, unless Interest satisfies the *Will*, and by it the *Reason*. By his speaking there of the main Points in Controversie between us, I perceive he is running from the whole business in hand, and seeking to shelter himself, and hide his Head in a Wilderness. But he shall not shift the Question thus, and fall to ramble into endless Disputes. Himself confess (*Second Letter, p. 20.*) our Question was about the General Grounds of our Faith, and not the particular Certainty as to this or that Doctrin, and I joyn'd issue with him upon the same. To run to particular points while That's a settling, is to put the Conclusions before the Premises; and, to go about to ascertain things depending intirely on a Method or Rule, without ascertaining that Method or Rule first, is to begin at the wrong end, and make the Cart draw the Horse.

S. 29. I owe him yet an Answer to St. Austin. He alledges that Father (p. 16.) whose Testimony says only, *That the Gospels are to be look't upon as Christ's own Hand-writing*, and that he directed the order and manner of the Evangelist's Writing; which only signifies they were divinely inspir'd in both: which none denies; nor has This any Influence upon the Point in hand. He could have quoted you other places out of Him, if he had pleas'd, which come up to it fully; and I shall supply his backwardness with doing it my self. *Quærendi dubitatio, &c.* (* says that Learned and Holy Father) * Lib. 1. Gen. The Doubt of Enquiry ought not to exceed the Bounds of ad Lit. Imperfect. cap. 1. Catholick Faith. And, because many Hereticks use to draw the

the Exposition of the Divine Scriptures to their own Opinion, which is against the Faith of the Catholick Discipline; therefore — *Ante tractationem huius Libri Catholica Fides explicanda est.* Before the handling this Book, the Catholick Faith is to be explained. Where Dr. S's Sober Enquirer is curb'd and restrain'd in his licentious Search of his Faith in Scripture, by the Catholick Faith, had (it seems) some other way ; for, were his Faith to be had merely by searching Scripture for it, with what sense ought he to be restrain'd, while he was in the Way to Faith : To restrain one who is *in the right Way*, is to hinder him from *going right*, or perhaps to put him *out of his Way*. Again, Tho' those Heretical Opinions were both against the true Sense of Scripture, and against Tradition too ; yet, had he held Scripture the Rule, he should rather have said they were *against the true signification of Scripture's Letter*, than *against the Faith of the Catholick Discipline*. Besides, if Catholick Faith was to be explain'd before they came to handle Scripture, how was Scripture the Rule for *all to come to Faith*, when as Faith was to be had (nay, well understood by the Explanation of it) antecedently, lest they might otherwise fall into Heresie ? And, in another place, speaking of a false Pointing of the Letter, made by the Arians, to abet their Heresie, he confutes them thus ; *

* De Doct.
Christ. l. 3.
c. 1.

Sed hoc — But this is to be refuted by the Rule of Faith, by which we are instructed before-hand in the Equality of the Trinity. Had this Rule of Faith been held by him to be the Letter of Scripture, he would have had recourse to some exacter Copy, correcting their faulty one ; and, so have born up still to that Rule : But 'tis evident he does not thus. He makes then the Sense of the Church or Tradition the Rule, both to know our Faith, and also to correct the faultinets of the Letter. Whether this suites better with

with the Drs. Principles or ours, is left to your selves or any man of reason to judg and determine.

9. 3d. Thus comes off this famous Sermon which makes such a noise, for a Confutation of the Traditionary Doctrin. The Sum of it is, 1. The Dr. takes no notice of the main Question betwixt us, which is about the *Absolute-Certainty* that our *Faith* is Truly Christian or taught by Christ, nor attempts to shew *this* is thus Certain; but Preaches to you *Stedfastness* and a *well-setled Resolution* to continue in it, yet avoids the giving you any Grounds to make you *Stedfast* and *Well-setled* in that resolution. 2. He conceals every Advantage *Christian Tradition* has, or is pretended to have; that is, he would perwade you to *Hate* it, before you *See* it, and to *compare* it to Scripture before you know what kind of thing it is; which is yet worse, he shews you *another* thing for *It*, and through all his Discourse pretends 'tis *It*, which is nothing at all to *It*, but utterly unlike *It*; viz. *Particular Traditions*, both before and after that *Universal Tradition* (only which we defend) was setled. 3. He fixes a *false date* upon the beginning of the Tradition we speak of, that the vast *source* of it, which (with the Circumstances annext) was able to continue the *Current* strong, and the *Derivation* of Christ's Doctrin both *Certain* and *Perpetual*, might not be reflected on. To deform it the more, he makes it meerly *Verbal*, as if it were nothing but the telling some dry story, by surpressing it's *Practicalness*, in which consists it's chiefest Virtue. 4. He hides from your consideration all the most Incomparable, and most Powerful Motives which enforce its Continuance, and oblige the Church never to forsake the first deliver'd Doctrin. 5. He never regards, even in those *Particular Traditions*, whether they fail'd the Persons, or the Persons fail'd *Them*; but

supposes still the Tradition was in all the fault, without attempting to shew it. 6. He would have you imagin the Church in the first Age (consisting of Pastors and People) lost all their Memory and Grace too, as soon as ever the Apostles were dead, lest it should be held Able and Willing to testify Christ's Doctrine to the Next Age, which by Parity would Establish it a Rule for all succeeding Ages to the End of the World. 7. He mingles known Opinions, and which he holds himself not to have been Universally deliver'd at first, with Points which we All hold to have been first deliver'd. Then, as to the Matter or Object of Tradition, which, and only which we pretend it is to bring down with absolute Certainty, and deliver Clearly (viz. the Dogmatical or Controverted Articles of Christian Faith, which are Practical) he never mentions it at all, with any distinction, but tumbles and confounds it with all things imaginable for which it was never pretended, and puts upon Tradition a hundred abus'd tasks as never thought of by us, so improper, &c oft-times impossible in themselves; As, the deriving down the Ten Commandments, Creeds, Decrees of Councils, *See Forms of Words*, an Infinity of particular passages not at all Practical, nay, whole Epistles and Gospels, Schemes of Doctrine taught by Heathen Philosophers, Mottings which use to be sent by long Letters, Historical Narrations or Actions; and in a word, every thing he could invent but the right one (viz. Those Controverted Points of Faith) tho' it lay just before him; the very nature of Controversy, which we are about, determining our Discourses to those Points, and nothing else: This is his General view of Scripture and Tradition, as to the way of conveying down matters of Faith. He means a General view, which misrepresents and blinds your sight of it in every Partition.

Dr.: In a Word, there is much of Reading, Conduct and Wit in his Sermon; but wholly misemploy'd to speak as handsomely as he could *to no purpose*, and to miss the whole Point in *Question* with a great deal of Plausibility. In which, amongst his other Great Abilities, justly acknowledg'd to be Excellent, consists his most considerable Talent and Dexterity.

S. 31. So he ends his Sermon with good Advice to you to follow Christ's Heavenly Doctrin in your *Lives* and Conversations. Which, as he worthily presses upon you, so I shall heartily pray that God would vouchsafe you his Grace to follow it. I am far from blaming His or any one's Preaching the wholsome Moral Doctrines of Christianity, and laying it home to men's *Consciences*: But I ought not, if concern'd, to suffer, that, when he pretends to speak to your *Understandings*, and establish you in Faith, he should bubble his Auditory with forty impertinent pretences, Injurious to his candid Adversaries and to Truth, as well as to your selves; please and delude your Fancies with a great shew of his Reading, and little conjectural Reflexions tack't prettily together; and, in the mean time, send you away empty of knowing any Ground which may render you, or any, *Absolutely Certain*, that what you hold is indeed Christ's Doctrin; that is, any Ground of perfect security; that is, *cannot but be indeed his Doctrin*; without being which it ought not be held *True*. Whereas yet, 'tis only *this Certainty* which can give His or any other Sermon it's full force and Energy.

Your Servant in Christ,

J. S.

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